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Toronto left high and dry

THE PROVINCE

Budget lacks any major new funding for major city

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

It's a budget for Ontario, just not Toronto.

The provincial Liberals unveiled the 2016 budget Thursday, announcing free tuition for low-income families, $3 billion in new infrastructure spending and plans to regulate the sharing economy.

However, the budget lacks any major new funding for Toronto. There's no dedicated cash for Toronto Community Housing, and once-touted light rail projects along Sheppard Avenue East and the Lakeshore aren't even mentioned.

"It looks like we're being left to fend for ourselves," said Coun. Mike Layton.

The budget largely reiterates existing commitments in Toronto, including $13.5 billion for Regional Express Rail along the GO corridor and already announced funding for the Eglinton LRT.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa did announce a $178 million boost to the Liberals' affordable housing strategy, but it's unclear how much — if any — will go towards helping plug TCH's $2.6-billion repair backlog.

Provincial NDP Leader Andrea Horwath called the lack of concrete support for Toronto infrastructure "worrisome."

$3B

New infrastructure spending announced by the Ontario Liberals for 2016 — **but where's our city?**

The budget does mention Mayor John Tory's SmartTrack plan, which would run along GO rail tracks, but says the project will only proceed if "partner funding" is secured, presumably from the federal government.

"Typically, those projects are funded one-third from the city, one-third from the province and one-third from the federal government," Layton said. "If the province doesn't come in, people waiting for their houses to be fixed or for better transit will be waiting for a long time."

James McKellar, a professor at York University's Schulich School of Business, said it's unfair for the city to expect handouts from the province when it hasn't made full use of its own revenue tools.

"Everyone is saying we need the money but we don't want to use our taxing powers to do it," he said. "There's a day of reckoning coming, and if the city wants more infrastructure, it's going to have to bring in user fees."

In particular, McKellar said the city should consider implementing road tolls on the Gardiner and the Don Valley Expressway, and use the revenue to fund transit plans.

"As a transit rider, I pay a toll every time I use public transit, but when I look out the window next to me, the drivers aren't paying anything."

BUZZWORTHY

Toronto pledges to protect pollinators in bid to become Bee City Canada

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metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

French court OKs razing of makeshift migrant camp in Calais. **World**

THEFT

Baby cam points to suspects

Police say a baby monitor was doing more than keeping an eye on the baby — it helped officers identify three suspects in a series of thefts north of Toronto.

York Regional Police say a home in Richmond Hill was broken into on Dec. 19, 2015, and the incident was captured on video by a baby monitor. Investigators say they identified the suspects from the video and that the suspects were later linked to several incidents in which shoppers had their wallets and bags removed from shopping carts at various stores in Vaughan.

Police say a series of search warrants were executed earlier this month in Toronto and officers seized a large quantity of jewelry, tools, clothing and collectibles.

Three people were to appear in court Thursday in Newmarket, facing various theft-related charges. THE CANADIAN PRESS

ROADS

Hit-and-run victim taken to trauma centre

Police hunted for an unknown vehicle after a hit and run near Don Mills and Finch Avenue E. Thursday morning. Paramedics got a call around 9:10 a.m. saying a pedestrian had been struck. They took a woman in her 40s to hospital with serious injuries. No suspect information is available. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Relief as Liberals plan to repeal Tories' C-24 bill

LEGISLATION

Toronto father welcomes proposed changes

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

The Liberal government's plan to quash laws that make it harder for people to become Canadian citizens is music to Germain Zima's ears.

"I still can't believe it," the Toronto-based human resources analyst said Thursday as the plan was announced.

The 33-year-old father of a newborn son was just weeks away from submitting his citizenship application when, last June, the Conservative government changed the rules, making immigrants wait longer to apply. Zima has since been at the forefront of calls for the new government to change the law.

"A law that alienates some was un-Canadian," he said. "Repealing it, and repealing it this quick, that's Canadian."

The proposed changes — expected to take effect sometime this year — will provide greater flexibility for applicants trying to meet requirements for citizenship, Immigration Minister John McCallum said.

Permanent residents would be required to be in Canada for three years, down from four, before applying. They would get credit for time spent on student or work visas prior to becoming permanent residents, a practice the Conservatives nixed.

The age range for language and citizenship knowledge exams would also be amended, exempting those younger than 18 or older than 54.

McCallum's bill would also repeal perhaps the most controversial provision of the law: allowing the government to revoke citizenship from dual citizens convicted of "acts against national interests."

Immigration officials would still have the power to revoke citizenship if it was obtained by false representation or fraud.

The federal court could still revoke citizenship for people involved in organized crime, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

WITH FILES FROM TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Germain Zima, who was prevented from applying for citizenship when Bill C-24 came into effect last year, is thankful the government is moving toward repealing the law. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

SPEEDING UP

The backlog of citizenship applications ballooned under Stephen Harper. Immigration Minister John McCallum said new resources have been brought in and applications are now being processed within 12 months.

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Target's Canadian drama hits the stage

ART

Theatre group looking for space ahead of August debut

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Target arrived in Canada to much fanfare in 2013. Less than two years later, the company declared bankruptcy, closing 133 stores and laying off 17,600. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The dramatic rise and fall of Target Canada is about to be dramatized.

Outside the March theatre company will stage Community Target, a site-specific theatre project exploring the discount retailer's failed foray into Canada. Director Robert Motum is hoping the set will be a former Target store in Toronto.

"I'm interested in unusual spaces and abandoned spaces, and I was constantly passing these massive retail voids of space in almost every community," the 24-year-old said. "I want to fill one of those voids with something creative and productive."

The project, expected to be ready for an August debut, is still in its early stages, and Motum is busy interviewing former Target employees, from cashiers to managers.

"It's fascinating," he said. "They knew from the beginning that things weren't going well."

Motum wants to tell the stories of those workers, many of whom reported receiving gag orders from Target in its final days. He's also hoping to explore the impact the store closures had on mom and pop shops that depended on the retailer for foot traffic.

Ultimately, the young playwright wants the audience to re-examine their own relationship with big box stores.

"When you've got everything for the lowest price, you have to ask yourself what the true cost of that price is," he said. "Where do those products come from and who is affected along the way?"

+ INTERVIEW

Ex-Target workers wanted

Robert Motum is looking to speak with more Target Canada employees.

If you are willing to be interviewed, you can reach him by email at OTMcommunitytarget@gmail.com.

Robert Motum
CONTRIBUTED

LABOUR

Protesters rally for fair city contracts

More than 200 people including federal NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair and some Toronto councillors rallied in front of city hall demanding a fair contract for more than 28,000 city inside workers.

Flag-waving CUPE Local 79 members chanted "Work to rule!" and "No free work" on Thursday as provincial and national union leaders pledged solidarity with their fight for full-time permanent jobs rather than "precarious" work.

But as they talked of unity, 5,400 outside city workers in another CUPE local were voting on a proposed four-year contract that was negotiated by their union leaders. Mayor John Tory has said that deal should also be good enough for the inside workers.

Local 79 president Tim Maguire told reporters his members are different than outside workers. Of the daycare and shelter workers, nurses, cleaners, planners and more, three-quarters are women and more than half are part-time or full-time temporary.

"We will look at that result (of the Local 416 vote) and study our options, both at the bargaining table and otherwise as we go forward," Maguire said, adding the deal for inside workers "has to represent our needs."

NDP leader Thomas Mulcair TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Mulcair said in an interview he was in Toronto and thought it important to support Local 79 and the fight against part-time and precarious work.

"It's about time the public-sector employers understood that it's not a good thing for them to increase precarity — people have to know that they're going to be getting their hours, they have to know that a full-time job is there for them," he said.

Results of the Local 416 ratification vote are expected to be announced late Thursday.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Vincent van Gogh's **Starry Night over the Rhone** at Arles, 1888. CONTRIBUTED

Wonder of nature to fit inside AGO

VISUAL ART

Exhibit brings in landscape masterworks from 15 nations

The Art Gallery of Ontario is partnering with the Musée d'Orsay in Paris on an exhibition of paintings from such masters as Gauguin and van Gogh, Americans Georgia O'Keeffe and Whistler and Canadian Emily Carr.

Mystical Landscapes will include close to 90 paintings and 20 works on paper by 36 artists from 15 countries.

It will open at the Toronto gallery on Oct. 22 and run till Jan. 29, 2017 before opening at d'Orsay in spring 2017.

"These masterpieces convey experiences that cannot be put into words," curator Katharine Lochnan said in a release.

"The feeling of connecting with a deeper reality, a power much greater than ourselves, is a mystical experience. These experiences may reach any of us through the contemplation of nature and the cosmos. We are moved by the beauty of sunrise and sunset, the stars in the night sky, the reflections of the moon on lakes, the power of the ocean waves and the vision of snow-capped mountains.

"These paintings convey the artists' mystical experiences of something greater than themselves. It is primarily through the contemplation of nature that they have seen with greater clarity."

The exhibit has been developed over five years with help from an advisory group drawn largely from University of Toronto faculty, including experts in the fields of theology, history, astrophysics, medicine and psychology. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

HIGHLIGHTS

- Vincent van Gogh's The Starry Night over the Rhone at Arles, 1888
- Paul Gauguin's Vision after the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel), 1888
- Claude Monet's Water Lilies (Nymphéas), 1907
- Edvard Munch's The Sun
- Georgia O'Keeffe's Series I — from the Plains, 1919
- A series of lithographs by Charles-Marie Dulac, which illustrates St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Creation

Water Lilies. CONTRIBUTED

TORONTO ZOO

Military gets right to bear charms

Say hello to Juno, the furriest new recruit for the Canadian Forces.

In a ceremony Thursday, the Toronto Zoo and Brig.-Gen. David Patterson of the Canadian Forces unveiled the new cub's name and announced her promotion to the rank of private.

"Personally, I've never been to a polar bear adoption ceremony before, so this is a first for me as well," said Patterson.

He said Juno was named in honour of Juno Beach — the code name given to Canadian soldiers' designated landing area on D-Day — because she was born on Remembrance Day 2015. Officials with the Toronto Zoo contacted the Forces to ask if they'd adopt her as an official mascot.

Juno has been moved to the Polar Bear House at the zoo and will now be visible to the public at select times starting this Saturday. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Juno meets the public. BERNARD WEIL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Tenants fight for rights

PRIVATIZATION

For-profit evictions will be 'disastrous', warn advocates

Tenants' rights advocates are concerned Ontario might privatize the enforcement of eviction orders, introducing a "U.S.-style" system where profits trump the wellbeing of low-income residents who fall behind on the rent.

Currently, government officers in the "civil enforcement service" carry out eviction orders from the Landlord and Tenant Board, and impose court orders to seize property from people in debt, among other duties. The Ministry of the Attorney General issued a notice in January that it is mulling whether to privatize the enforcement service.

"The main thing that we want is for evictions to be motivated by the law, motivated by some kind of process," said Geordie Dent, executive director of the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations. "We don't want the for-profit motive to be a driving force. We think that would open up a can of worms and be disastrous."

Ibrahim Bozai, board member with OPSEU, is worried about government plans to potentially privatize civil enforcement officers. KEITH BEATY/TORONTO STAR

The province has two options on the table: create a quasi-independent, not-for-profit corporation to carry out this service, or approve a list of private contractors to enforce civil orders.

Under the first model, a private corporation called a "delegated administrative authority" (DAA) would hire and train enforcement officers according to rules drawn up in new government legislation, Brendan Crawley, spokesperson for the Ministry of the Attorney General, said in an email. The province would set fees, the enforcement rules, and the composition of the corporation's board of directors.

Under the private-contractor option, the province would be responsible for training standards and investigating public complaints, while employees of various companies would handle seizures, evictions and other services.

The goal is to give court and tribunal "clients" — landlords and people who are awarded financial compensation in court, for instance — more options to enforce these orders, and to speed up the service process, Crawley said.

"Both models ensure that the government retains overall accountability and control," he said.

Ibrahim Bozai, executive board member for the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, called the government's private-contractor model "a very dangerous idea" that amounts to "U.S.-style" privatization.

Aside from the roughly 60 enforcement officers and supporting staff who could lose their jobs if the service gets contracted out, Bozai said a private system could harm tenants and debtors — especially if the government opts for the private contractor model.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

RECREATION

Pop-up park date set

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Skateboarders in Toronto will get the chance to pop tricks at a pop-up skatepark next month.

The former Hamilton Gears warehouse at 950 Dupont St. will be transformed into an indoor park and music venue courtesy of Vans footwear, from March 16 to April 2.

The venerable shoe company has been tight lipped about the project — no one at Vans Canada was available for comment Thursday — and the musical lineup hasn't been released.

Migs Bartula, co-chair of the Toronto Skateboarding Committee, said the indoor park will give skaters a place to ollie, grind and flip, safe from the final remnants of winter.

"There's no indoor parks downtown — it can be a tough business model — so these pop-up ones can fill that need," he said, noting a similar park run last year was "very popular."

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

The Toronto South Detention Centre (TSDC) is seeking one part-time member to serve on the local Community Advisory Board.

Applicants should reside in the Greater Toronto Area, with recognized and responsible community involvement in areas such as social services, the criminal justice system and/or other service to the community.

The Community Advisory Board acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and provides advice on all aspects of TSDC operations. Members visit the TSDC on a regular basis and meet monthly as a board. Members are appointed for a term of up to three years, subject to renewal.

Additional information can be found on the Public Appointments Secretariat (PAS) website **www.ontario.ca/publicappointments.**

To apply by email, fax, mail or hand delivery, a downloadable application form is available from the PAS website.

Applications must be received by March 14, 2016.

Ontario

TRANSIT

Metrolinx criticism mounting

Jessica Smith Cross
Metro | Toronto

Metrolinx's critics piled on Thursday — claiming ridership problems on the Union-Pearson Express prove the provincial transit agency is "incompetent" and "doesn't really know what it's doing."

Amalgamated Transit Union president Bob Kinnear led the charge, releasing a fiery statement calling the UP Express a "fiasco."

Metrolinx slashed fares on the UP Express this week by more than in a bid to boost the service's low ridership numbers. Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca and Metrolinx had previously said it would take time — not a price cut — to attract more riders.

Kinnear called that stance "pathetic" and said "it only adds to the charge that incompetence is the main problem."

The UP Express isn't the union's only problem with Metrolinx, Kinnear told Metro. The union is mostly concerned with the agency's use of public-private partnerships, which employ non-union workers. The UP Express just provides "an example of the incompetence of transit planning," he said.

The UP Express opened June 6 taking people between Union Station and Pearson in 25 minutes. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The Options for Davenport group was also on the agency's case Thursday. But, their grievance with Metrolinx isn't really about UP Express either: The group opposes plans for an overpass in the Davenport area.

Group spokesman Sam Barbieri said there is at least one similarity between the airport train and the overpass: Metrolinx hasn't listened to people's concerns.

Many people raised objections to the high price of the UP Express before it became clear that ridership was too low. But, the agency didn't listen, and isn't listening to residents of Davenport now, Barbieri said.

THE RESPONSE

Company defends actions

Metrolinx spokeswoman Anne Marie Aikins said the UP Express fares are only one small part of the agency's "huge undertaking" of more than 200 projects in the GTHA.

"We believe that we have the public's confidence and we will continue to respect that," Aikins said. "We're moving forward and working as hard as we can."

Bees at YYBeez honeybee apiary at Pearson Airport.
ANDREW FRANCIS WALLACE/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Toronto: hive of activity

CONSERVATION

Plan to turn into the first Canadian Bee City

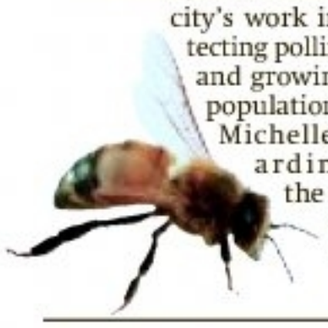
Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

T.O. Bee or not T.O. Bee? That's the question.

And members of the city's parks and environment committee believe they have the answer.

With approval from city council and a successful application to Bee City Canada, Toronto could officially become the first Canadian Bee City by end of March.

It's all about increasing the city's work in protecting pollinators and growing the population, said Michelle Berardinetti, the councillor who's got everyone buzzing about the idea.



"An added designation is about public education and community involvement," she said. "Our city is already doing a lot in bee farming and protection, and we need to serve as a leading example to the rest of Canada."

Toronto is home to more than 300 species of bees and hundreds of other pollinators, which makes it one of the country's most diverse areas when it comes to pollination.

Programs to support pollination already exist in places such as the Evergreen Brick Works, the Humber Bay Butterfly Habitat and High Park's Black Oak Savannah. Bees are also being raised in hives on the roofs of several downtown buildings, including the Royal York.

An official Bee City certification is the next logical step in showing the city's commitment and will offer a chance for broader collaboration, Berardinetti said.

City staff is working on a report that will be tabled to council early next month. Assuming it's approved, the city's application can make a bee line to the appropriate authorities.

Berardinetti, herself a bee and butterfly gardener, said the importance of bees can't be overstated.

"We make billions of dollars off their work, but they're not exactly paid for it," she said, adding the least people could do is to ensure their habitat is properly protected. "If we didn't have bees, there are so many fruits and vegetables that actually wouldn't exist."

POLLI-NATION

Bee City Canada is an offshoot of Bee City U.S.A., an initiative encouraging city leaders to celebrate everything bees contribute to the world.

With the motto "making the world safer for pollinators one city at a time," the American enterprise has bestowed the Bee City title to 15 cities and two university campuses.

CRIMINAL COURT

Turtle-smuggler sentenced

A man caught smuggling nearly 40 turtles in his pants has been fined $3,500 and placed on probation for two years.

Dong Yan of Windsor, Ont., was convicted earlier this month of illegally importing reptiles into Canada that were transported in contravention of a foreign state's law.

During an inspection at the Niagara border crossing on June 11, 2014, Canada Border Services Agency officials discovered 38 turtles strapped to Yan's legs.

Court heard the turtles were contained in plastic bags and taped to Yan's legs under his pants.

Officials say $2,000 from the fine will be directed to the Environmental Damages Fund.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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ONTARIO'S 2016 BUDGET

$133 BILLION

(spending plan)

Finance Minister Charles Sousa delivered the Ontario budget Thursday. These are the highlights.

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Net debt, present

$5.7 B
Budget deficit, 2015-16
That's down from the last estimate of $7.5 billion.

$308 B
Net debt, 2016-17
That makes us the largest sub-national borrower in the world, costing $11.8 billion in interest payments.

$4.6 B
Deficit, 2016-17
The deficit would be reduced to zero the following fiscal year.

5 WAYS YOU'LL BE AFFECTED

STUDENTS

Good news: Post-secondary students from low-income families stand to benefit the most from the fiscal plan. Starting in 2017-18, the province will create the Ontario Student Grant. Tuition will be free for students from families with incomes up to $50,000 who attend any college or university in Canada. More than half of students from families with incomes up to $83,000 will receive non-repayable grants that exceed the average tuition.

CAP AND TRADE

Good news: Proceeds from cap-and-trade, designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, are projected to be $1.9 billion in 2017 — up from last year's projection of $1.3 billion — and will be used to invest in green projects and climate change initiatives.
Bad news: The average natural gas cost to households will increase $5 per month, while the price of gasoline will go up about $4.3 cents per litre, about $8 per month.

CIGARETTES AND WINE

Bad news: The cost of cigarettes and wine is going up. There will be a $3 increase in the price of a carton of 200 cigarettes, effective Friday, and the tobacco tax will rise with inflation each year over the next five years. The minimum price for a bottle of wine rises to $7.95 over the next three years, and there will be a series of increases in the ad valorem tax on wine, starting with a two percentage point hike in June.

HEALTH CARE

Good news: Hospital funding is increasing by $345 million. Of that, $130 million will be spent on cancer-care services and $75 million is earmarked for community-based residential hospices and palliative care. The government will also spend $333 million over five years on autism services.
Bad news: The Ontario Health Coalition and the Ontario Nurses' Association said the funding is a great step but isn't enough to make up for four years of frozen hospital budgets.

SENIORS

Good news: Single seniors earning up to $19,300 a year will be eligible for cheaper drugs beginning August, compared with the previous threshold of $16,018. Couples with an income of up to $32,300 will also be eligible, where before only those earning $24,175 qualified. The costs will be offset by raising deductibles and co-payments for seniors above the new income thresholds.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/ISTOCK

Back to jail for Bantleman

INDONESIA

High court overturns acquittal of schoolteacher

Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion said the Canadian government "is deeply dismayed and shocked" by an Indonesian Supreme Court decision to overturn the acquittal of Canadian schoolteacher Neil Bantleman.

In its decision, the high court also ordered both Bantleman and an Indonesian teaching assistant to serve 11 years in prison instead of the 10 years they initially received for sexually abusing three young children at a prestigious international school in Jakarta.

Bantleman and Ferdinant Tijong were sentenced in April 2015 but maintained their innocence and filed appeals to the High Court, which acquitted them last August.

Supreme Court spokesman Suhadi said a three-member judge panel handed down its verdict on Wednesday based on the prosecutors' appeal.

"The judge panel concluded that the defendants were proven to have violated the 2007 Child Protection Law," said Suhadi, who uses a single name. "It did not only reinstate the District Court's verdict but also lengthened the sentence to 11 years."

The pair were also ordered to pay a $7,440 fine each or to serve six more months in jail.

Under Indonesian law, both Bantleman and Tijong still could challenge the sentence by filing for judicial review by the Supreme Court if they have new evidence.

"This decision is unjust, given the many grave irregularities throughout the various proceedings in this case and the fact that all evidence presented by the defence has systematically been rejected," Dion said in a statement early Thursday.

Chandra Saptaji, head of the general crime section at the South Jakarta Prosecutors' Office, said they are still looking for Bantleman, who is under a ban to leave the country. "Hopefully, he is co-operative and complying with Indonesia law."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN HAPPIER TIMES: Canadian schoolteacher Neil Bantleman and wife Tracy after his release from Jakarta's Cipinang prison on Aug. 14, 2015. Bantleman has been ordered back to jail after his acquittal was overturned on Feb. 25. ROMEO GACAD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

APPEAL

What's next

The Indonesian Supreme Court has overturned the acquittal of Neil Bantleman in a decision that has "stunned" the Canadian schoolteacher's family.

What's his next legal step?

Bantleman's brother, Guy, says the family will apply for a judicial review at the Supreme Court. Papang Hidayat, an Indonesia-based researcher with Amnesty International, has said a judicial review can be granted if the defence has new evidence to present. That evidence would be heard by a different panel of Supreme Court judges — usually three — than the ones who heard the case previously.

How about an appeal to the president?

A convicted person can appeal directly to the president of Indonesia for clemency, Hidayat said, "but it's very rare, actually, for ordinary cases like this" for the president to get involved at all. Article 14 of the Indonesian Constitution gives the president the power to grant "clemency and restoration of rights" to prisoners after getting advice from the Supreme Court. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

BIRTHDAYS

Leap-year babies face myriad annoyances

It's rare for Laura Pedersen to celebrate a birthday on the day she was actually born. The only thing less common for her is hassle-free paperwork.

Her status as a leap-year baby ensures that genuine birthday festivities are only possible once every four years. That same Feb. 29 birth date also creates day-to-day hassles.

Online application forms insist leap day doesn't exist. Official insurance forms document the wrong birthday. And no matter what administrative process she's trying to tackle, she inevitably faces questions as to whether she was, in fact, born on leap day.

The Honor Society of Leap Year Day Babies was created in 1997 not only to celebrate the unusual date, but to raise awareness of the challenges associated with it and to advocate for those affected by such hassles.

Co-founder Peter Brouwer said leapers have experienced everything from webpage shutdowns to halted banking transactions due to the lack of familiarity with the date by authorities. He even recalled a society member who was accused of using a falsified driver's licence because of his date of birth. THE CANADIAN PRESS

LEAPERS FUN FACTS

Why do leap years exist?

Leap year is the reason that seasons occur at the same time each year. The Earth takes 365.24 days to make a complete cycle around the sun. Every four years, the world would be a full day out of sync with the calendar.

How does it work?

The Gregorian calendar has a 400-year repeat cycle, in which every year number divisible by four (2016, for example) has a leap day appended to February, except if the year number is divisible by 100.

PLANET PAWS

Site reaches celebrity status

Yvette d'Entremont
Metro | Halifax

In just six days he has reached almost 107 million people on Facebook, enjoyed 23.5 million engagements on his posts and garnered 45,039 new page likes.

He also has acquired 'Facebook Mentions' status, something reserved for actors, sports stars and other well-known public figures.

So Dartmouth-based blogger Rodney Habib was thrilled, but not surprised, to learn that he has the largest pet nutrition-related Facebook page in the world.

"On Wednesday someone tried to hack me, and Facebook messaged me and we had a live conversation," Habib recalled.

"The Facebook employee and I chatted and she said 'These guys have spent a lot of money trying to shut your page down.' Within that conversation was when I was told 'You have the largest pet nutrition-related site in the world.'"

Rodney Habib and his dog Sammie. JEFF HARPER/METRO

Habib's social media presence has exploded since 2014. Last year, Facebook reps came to Halifax to host a seminar for small business owners looking for tips to increase their Facebook presence. Due to the popularity of his Planet Paws blog page, Habib was one of the speakers.

Last month Facebook told Habib he had to upgrade his personal page because so many people wanted to connect with him outside of his Planet Paws page.

Habib said he never dreamed his blog would grow to this level. He initially started it as a way to share information about pet health and nutrition after experiencing frustration over food-related issues with his dogs.

"I'm not a doctor, I don't claim to be a nutritionist or to be the top in the world," he said.

"I call myself a blogger because I work with experts and I get to be the middle man. My job is to be a story teller."

FATALITIES

Mumbai declares 16 no-selfie zones

Look around in any major Indian city, and you will find someone with an arm outstretched, mobile phone in hand, smiling widely and clicking away. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has embraced the medium, posting pictures online he's snapped with various world leaders.

But the pursuit of the most epic selfie can have lethal consequences.

India is home to the highest number of people who have died while taking photos of themselves, with 19 of the world's 49 recorded selfie-linked deaths since 2014, according to San Francisco-based data service provider Priceonomics. The statistic may in part be due to India's sheer size, with 1.25 billion citizens and one of the world's fastest-growing smartphone markets.

Alarmed by the trend, Mumbai has declared 16 no-selfie zones across the city, as authorities warn people against taking unnecessary risks.

Earlier this month, an 18-year-old college student on a class picnic lost his balance while taking a selfie atop a rock near a dam near the central Indian city of Nashik. He fell into the water and drowned, along with a classmate who jumped in to try to save him.

Last month, an 18-year-old woman fell and drowned in the sea while taking a photo of herself at Mumbai's Bandstand Fort, a popular tourist spot.

After the woman's death last month, the city's police conducted a survey to identify such dangerous places, police official Dhananjay Kulkarni said. The city also plans to run an awareness campaign. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOTO FINISH

Fines set at 1,200 rupees

In Mumbai, police have declared selfies off-limits in areas perceived as risky, such as coastline locations with no railings or barriers. Anyone venturing into off-limits areas, even if they take no photos, risks being slapped with a fine of 1,200 rupees, or about $18. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An Indian family takes a selfie in Mumbai's coastline.
RAFIQ MAQBOOL/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Court OKs razing of migrant camp

FRANCE

State to evict hundreds of refugees from site near Calais

A French court gave the state the green light Thursday to raze makeshift tents and leantos used by hundreds of migrants at a sprawling slum in Calais, where many dream of slipping into Britain.

Tamping down fears of a violent confrontation, France's interior minister promised to treat the migrants humanely and not send in bulldozers to evict them.

The camp in the northern port city, known as "the Jungle," has been an embarrassing chapter in Europe's migrant crisis, and France announced this month that its densely populated southern half would be razed. The move prompted rights groups and migrant advocates to sue.

The court in Lille ruled that the makeshift shelters used by the migrants can be destroyed, but that common spaces like places of worship, schools and a library must be left standing.

Calais' prime location, with a major ferry port, Eurotunnel rail system and truck traffic crossing the English Channel, has put it in the crosshairs of the migrant crisis.

Officials say moving migrants out of the Calais slum will be a better solution for all, since many have been languishing in poverty and hopelessness after nearby borders have been sealed by increasing security.

Officials estimate the number of migrants who will be affected at 800 to 1,000, while humanitarian organizations say over 3,000 migrants live there. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

1 A man talks on the phone in the "Jungle," a migrant and refugee camp in Calais. On Thursday, a French court gave the green light to plans to evacuate hundreds of migrants from the notorious makeshift camp. DENIS CHARLET/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

2 A child rides his bicycle in the makeshift camp for migrants. In November, the state said the number of minors without families in the camp was 326. JEROME DELAY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

3 A Pakistani migrant selling cigarettes stands in his shop in the camp known as the "Jungle." DENIS CHARLET/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

We're visiting soon

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*As per The Princeton Review Top Undergraduate Schools for Video Game Design for 2015.

February 27, 2016

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Information Session 10:00 AM
One-on-One Meetings 12:00 PM

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REPUBLICAN RACE

Rubio, Cruz team up on Trump in debate

Presidential candidates Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz barrelled into Thursday's Republican debate in Houston eager to seize one last chance to slow Donald Trump's before next week's Super Tuesday mega-round of voting, and immediately took him on over his immigration positions and more.

In the night's first exchange, Florida Sen. Rubio accused the billionaire businessman of shifting positions on deportation, hiring people from other countries to take jobs from Americans and being fined for worker violations.

Joining in, Cruz criticized Trump for suggesting he alone had "discovered the issue of illegal immigration."

Trump shot back at Rubio: "I hired tens of thousands of people. You've hired nobody."

Donald Trump speaks as Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, looks on.
DAVID J. PHILLIP/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the past, the two had shown little willingness to take on the former reality television star when the national spotlight shines brightest.

That changed in the ninth Republican debate of the presidential campaign.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

SeaWorld admits putting plant in animal rights group

SeaWorld acknowledged that it sent its own workers to infiltrate an animal rights group that opposed the practices of the theme park. SeaWorld Entertainment CEO Joel Manby vowed Thursday to end the practice. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Most ISIL bombs made with civilian parts: Report

The Islamic State group relies on commercially available components for most of its bombs, according to a report by a London-based research group. Conflict Armament Research says many components are also used for civilian purposes, such as mining, making them relatively easy to get.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Spend to spur growth

ECONOMY

Canada must invest in job creation, says OECD

The Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development has lent its voice to growing calls for more government spending in response to slowing global growth, a policy Canada's government is already planning to pursue in its first federal budget.

Amid persistently low oil prices and a slowing growth in China, the global economy urgently needs a stronger and more co-ordinated policy response to create jobs, the OECD said in its annual Going for Growth report.

Measures specific to Canada could include more support for research and development, better access to post-secondary education, an end to restrictions on foreign investment in telecom and broadcast companies, and privatizing Canada post, the agency said.

The OECD also called for greater government investment in infrastructure projects to create jobs and boost economic growth.

"Today's exceptionally low interest rates improve governments' fiscal space, affording a unique opportunity to make investments in infrastructure that will boost demand, stoke growth and actually improve public finances," OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said in a statement released ahead of the two-day gathering.

The report was to be released Friday in Shanghai at the start of a G20 meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors.

As an oil producing and exporting nation, Canada has been particularly hit hard by the dramatic plunge in the global price of crude from $100 US a barrel in June 2014 to $30 US.

The Canadian government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has pledged to boost infrastructure spending in its first federal budget, to be presented March 22, even though it will mean running a higher federal deficit. Both the OECD and the International Monetary Fund lowered their forecasts for global growth on persistently low prices for crude oil and concerns about weakness in China's economy.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau takes part in a plenary session at the G20 Summit in Antalya, Turkey, in November. An OECD report to be released Friday at the G20 meeting in Shanghai will lend its voice to growing calls for more government spending in response to slowing global growth. SEAN KILPATRICK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

REAL ESTATE

Canadians feel cost of housing squeeze

Thandi Fletcher
Metro | Vancouver

Nearly half of people living in urban Canada say they're being squeezed by the cost of real estate, even in cities where prices pale in comparison to Vancouver and Toronto's sky-high markets, results of a new poll show.

Fifty-six per cent of Canadians, including those living in smaller real estate markets, say housing prices in their neighbourhoods fall outside of what's "reasonable," according to an Angus Reid Institute poll.

In Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal and Halifax, no fewer the 45 per cent of respondents view prices as either "high" or "unreasonably high," the poll results show.

The online survey of 5,867 Canadian adults who are members of the Angus Reid Forum was conducted between Feb. 2 and 10. The survey has a margin of error of 1.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Another survey of 1,513 Angus Reid Forum members was conducted Feb. 15 and has a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

IN BRIEF

Molson recreates 1908 ale

Molson Coors Canada says it's offering a limited release pale ale brewed from a 108-year-old recipe found deep in the company's archives.

Molson Coors says John H.R Molson and Bros. 1908 Historic Pale Ale was created to celebrate its 230 years of brewing in Canada.

The company says its brewmasters "worked tirelessly" to authentically recreate the pale ale of 1908. The recipe is one of the many historic documents found inside 400 cartons of Molson archives.

CONTRIBUTED

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Manna Research is currently seeking volunteers with **high blood pressure** to participate in a research study involving an investigational blood pressure medication. Eligible participants will receive study medication at no cost and may be reimbursed for their time and travel. Interested to learn more?

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metro VIEWS

Your essential daily news

INTRODUCING: SCIENCE FRIDAYS February 26, 2016

The nose knows: College students asked to sniff sweaty sports jerseys were significantly more disgusted by those with a rival's logo.

DECODED

Gravity does the wave

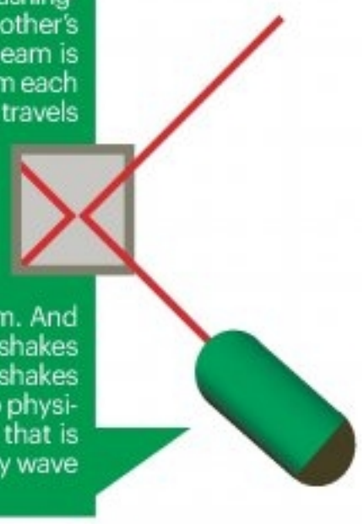
Nice job, Einstein. It's been a century since the super-smart physicist predicted the existence of **gravitational waves,** and three weeks since scientists announced they've directly detected them for the first time. It took us that long to stretch and warp our minds enough to understand how it is that space and time can be stretched and warped. Turns out this once-in-a-lifetime discovery is not as complicated as it seems — but way cooler: It's a potential new tool to observe more of "what's out there" than we've ever dreamed of seeing before.

1

WE NEVER DOUBTED YOU, AL
In 1916, Albert Einstein hypothesized that a massive explosion of energy — like, say, two black holes colliding 1.3 billion light-years away — would send out shock ripples called **gravitational waves,** jiggling the fabric of space and time. He was right. A little over a billion years later, those waves jiggled the Earth. Just the tiniest bit: by less than the width of an atom. And in September 2015, researchers at the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) measured that motion.

2

HOW DID THEY DO IT?
With ginormous lasers — plus a lot of other complex instruments and powerful computers — arranged identically in Louisiana and Washington State so the teams can check each other's work. Here's how it works: One laser beam is split into two beams travelling away from each other at a 90-degree angle. Each beam travels straight ahead for four kilometres, and then is bounced off a mirror. The two halves of the beam meet up again and merge into one. If a gravitational wave passes through, the mirrors wobble in a very specific way that scientists can see by analysing the recombined beam. And that's what happened. "First the signal shakes Louisiana, then 10 milliseconds later it shakes up Washington," University of Waterloo physicist Dr. Robert Mann told Metro. "And that is exactly how long it should take a gravity wave to go through the Earth."



3

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE — SORT OF
In ordinary life, it's helpful to think of time and space as constant and unchanging — as if, in the words of physicist Robert Mann, we all live and move around on a stage made of iron. But in reality, the stage is made of something like jelly. When a really massive object — like a black hole — steps onto the stage, the jelly sinks and bounces. Time can slow down or speed up. Space can expand or contract. And if a big enough shock to the system happens, a wave can ripple through the goo of space time — and that's what we call a gravitational wave.

4

CANADIAN CONNECTION
The LIGO collaboration included more than 1,000 scientists from 14 countries. Among them: Researchers at the University of Toronto, who performed some of the calculations to verify that LIGO's results were the real deal.

5

A NEW WINDOW INTO THE UNIVERSE
"The history of astronomy was based on light. We started out with visible light, and then we came up with technology where we could see radio waves, gamma rays, x-rays. Now what we're observing is not just another form of light. It's completely new. Anything that's dark in the universe **could** be revealed to us by gravitational waves. That's the promise this holds."

Dr. Eric Poisson,
Gravitational physicist
University of Guelph

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FREE TO SHARE

Genna Buck

Citizen Scientist

Will talcum powder give me ovarian cancer?

QUESTION

I read this week that Johnson & Johnson had to pay $72 million to the family of a woman who died of ovarian cancer caused by talcum powder. I'm in my 60s and have used talcum powder for half my life. I'm officially terrified!
Sincerely,
Sandy in Winnipeg

Dear Sandy,
The most important thing to know is that it's highly unlikely you'll get ovarian cancer, whether you use talc or not. About 1.3 per cent of women get ovarian cancer in their lifetimes. The greatest effect any study linking talc use to ovarian cancer showed around a 30 per cent increase in relative risk — meaning talc users would have something like a 1.69 per cent risk of getting ovarian cancer one day.

Johnson & Johnson lost its lawsuit because people in the corporation were told about the link and did not act on it.

But the evidence for the connection is mixed. Unlike smaller, older research papers on this issue, newer studies with larger samples mostly failed to find increased cancer rates among talc users — including women who put baby powder in a *diaphragm* (Ew). I suspect that the link is a hangover from the pre-1970s days when talcum contained asbestos, which does cause cancer.

Got a burning science question? Email scene@metronews.ca

PHILOSOPHER CAT
by Jason Logan

Philosopher cat now at www.mymetrostore.ca

metro WEEKEND
Your essential daily news
MOVIES MUSIC TELEVISION DIGITAL

Are the Oscars still relevant?

THE OSCARS

#OscarsSo-White reflects Academy's cultural disconnect

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

A friend is boycotting the Academy Awards because his favourite film of 2015, Star Wars: The Force Awakens, didn't make the Oscar's Best Picture list.

The awards, he says, aren't relevant because they ignore genre movies and in this particular case, have snubbed the most financially successful film of the year. In fact, the old canard that the Academy doesn't honour genre movies with Best Picture nods has been shot down this year with nominations for The Martian and Mad Max: Fury Road.

The Oscar folks also gave The Force Awakens five nominations and in recent years Inception, Avatar, District 9, Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King and Django Unchained have all earned top nods with Avatar and LOTR taking home the gold.

Genre movies do just fine with the Academy. No need for C-3PO to cry little metal tears. To the Academy's credit, not recognizing the year's box office behemoth while giving Room, a modestly grossing movie, Best Picture, Actress, Directing and Adapted Screenplay nods, actually suggests the Academy will not be wowed by wheelbarrows of cash.

Perhaps the truth is that the Oscars, and awards shows in general, are only as relevant as you want them to be. Are they as important as the Republican debates? It's all just show biz, so maybe. Ultimately, unless you're an actor, a director or a shareholder in a nominated film the Oscars are probably not extremely significant to your life. I pay attention to them as a function of my job, and I enjoy them, but this year I'm on board with my friend but for different reasons.

I'm disappointed in Oscar's failure to acknowledge diversity. For the second year in a row all 20 acting nominations went to white actors. To be clear I'm not implying the Academy is overtly racist. There are too many voters for there to be a conspiracy to keep actors of colour out of the headline categories. Have you ever gone to a restaurant with more than 10 people and tried to get everyone to agree on an appetizer for the table? It's nearly impossible. Now imagine trying to arrange collusion between 6,000 members of the Academy. Totally hopeless.

So if it's not a conspiracy why were stellar performances from Creed's Michael B. Jordan, The Hateful Eight's Samuel L. Jackson, Sicario's Benicio Del Toro, Beasts of No Nation's Idris Elba or any of Straight Outta Compton's top line cast not nominated? I think it's a combination of studio decision makers, who tend to be white, male and older coupled with the same demographic of voters at the Academy.

It's a systemic issue being addressed by Academy president Cheryl Boone Isaacs' effort to mould the Academy's membership to be more in line with the population.

Until the Oscars represent the full width and breadth of the best in Hollywood, regardless of race or gender, they will continue to slide toward irrelevancy. My guess is that the most interesting part of this year's ceremony won't be who wins Best Actor but host Chris Rock's opening monologue, which, if the movie gods prevail, will address the situation in no uncertain terms. It's a speech I'm predicting will be just as entertaining and provocative as any of the nominees, Star Wars: The Force Awakens included.

ACADEMY AWARDS AS LIGHTNING ROD

Outspoken at the Oscars

This year the #OscarsSoWhite movement made the Academy Awards a lightening rod for debate but the diversity issue is only the latest Oscars controversy.

1 Marlon Brando

In 1973 Marlon Brando made headlines when he sent Sacheen Littlefeather to refuse the Best Actor statue for his work in The Godfather. In a prepared statement she said Brando declined the award because of "the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry and on television and in movie reruns." The speech was met with boos and later Clint Eastwood said, "I don't know if I should present this award on behalf of all the cowboys shot in John Ford westerns over the years," as he presented the Best Picture award.

2 Vanessa Redgrave

Five years later as the Jewish Defense League burned effigies of pro-Palestinian activist Vanessa Redgrave outside the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion, the Julia actress accepted the Best Actress award inside. Drawing gasps from the audience she said she "refused to be intimidated by the threats of a small bunch of Zionist hoodlums." Later screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky said, "I'm sick and tired of people exploiting the Academy Awards for the propagation of their own personal propaganda," to rapturous applause.

3 Sarandon and Robbins

Chayefsky's scolding didn't seem to stick as actors continued to use the Oscar stage as a platform. In 1993 a trifecta of actors made the ceremony the most political ever. Best Film Editing presenters Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins criticized the government for incarcerating 266 HIV virus-infected Haitians in Guantanamo Bay while Richard Gere commented on human rights abuses in China. Show producer Gil Cates was outraged. "Does anyone care about Richard Gere's comments about China?" he said. "It's arrogant."

A PERFECT DAY

Benicio Del Toro tackles tricky role as aid worker

The last time we saw Benicio Del Toro on screen he was starring in Sicario as a mercenary who collected a handsome paycheque while quenching his thirst for revenge against drug cartel leaders.

He was vicious and malicious.

That movie's dark and gritty examination of the drug-fuelled Mexico-U.S. border war stands in stark contrast to his new movie, the optimistically titled A Perfect Day.

"I was finishing A Perfect Day when I went into Sicario. Perhaps that's one of the reasons Sicario was interesting, because it was the dark side of the coin."

Set in 1990s Balkans, Del Toro plays Mambrú, a misfit aid worker whose team (played by Tim Robbins and Olga Kurylenko among others) begin their day in the former Yugoslavia trying to remove a bloated corpse dumped in a well to contaminate the water.

The task is complicated by United Nations bureaucracy and the lack of a strong enough rope forcing the crew to navigate not only landmine-ridden roads but their own complicated relationships in search of a solution.

Director Fernando León de Aranoa calls Del Toro the centerpiece of the film, adding, "Working with him means working with a creative partner."

"There are some ideas that can come from anywhere that are golden," Del Toro says on improvising on set.

"I would like to say that I wish I could recognize good ideas when they are out there whether they come from another actor or they come from myself.

"If there is a good idea I do believe that if you don't take advantage of it while you are making the film it'll be gone forever."

Del Toro, who is currently filming Star Wars: Episode VIII, says the A Perfect Day script appealed to him because it was about "people trying to do good and just how complicated it can get, but with elements of humour.... It was like a riddle to solve," he says.

"Can the movie balance these two things? I think it does. The darkness of the war and the job with the humour."

More importantly, he met with his character's real-life counterparts.

"I had met some aid workers and I will tell you, they all have a good sense of humour.

It's a way of dealing with the darkness of their experiences and the pain." RICHARD CROUSE/FOR METRO

Benicio Del Toro CONTRIBUTED

STYLISH STARS ARE THEY CUT OUT FOR THESE LOOKS?

Metro's Oscar fashion panel suggests three gowns ahead of Sunday's show. Dress the dolls yourself by clipping them out! NICHOLE JANKOWSKI METRO

@JILLIANVIEIRA

Jillian Vieira is the fashion editor at The Kit, Canada's 360-degree beauty & style leader.

We've already seen Brie favour sexy cut-outs and slinky silhouettes this awards season. As a serious best actress contender, I'd love for her to have a cool-girl princess moment in a dramatic, tulle-heavy Giambattista Valli.

@DANIESQUE

Known to favour feminine silhouettes, Brie could seriously rock a Delpozo dress. She's already proven that she can wear colour — and Delpozo's ability to pair nearly-fluorescent hues with neutrals and pastels is unmatched.

@MICHELLEADDISONSTYLE

If I was her stylist I'd try to get her in a Giambattisa Valli frock (think Rihanna at the 2015 Grammys). Since her fellow nominees are known to wear lighter colours, I'd like to see her stand out in a darker hue.

@MICHELLEADDISONSTYLE

Michelle Addison is one of Vancouver's top stylists. Catch her fashion segments on CTV Morning Live.

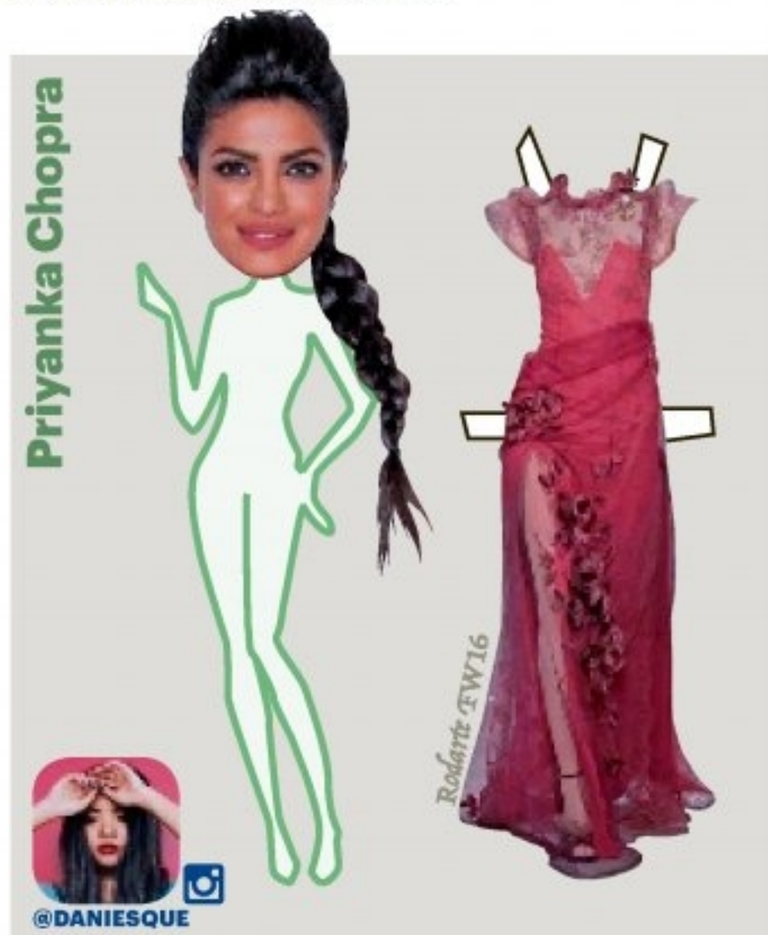
Colour, colour and more colour. Nothing could stop this lady from being the centre of a room. She loves classic cuts and unfussy fashion. I would love to see her in yellow or gold. Oscar de la Renta or Calvin Klein would be good choices for her.

@JILLIANVIEIRA

There's very little Lupita can't pull off: flapper dresses, Grecian gowns and a one-piece column dress with cape have all earned her sartorial praise. A couture jumpsuit (à la Dior) would really solidify her Red Carpet Queen status.

@DANIESQUE

I'd love to see Lupita in Sid Neigum. While beautiful, her red carpet looks all follow similar silhouettes. Sid is known for dramatic, structured designs. Lupita could definitely pull off one of his runway-ready looks.



@DANIESQUE

Dani Roche is a designer, creative director, and the owner of Kastor & Pollux, a Toronto design and experiences agency.

Rodarte is known for their fairy-tale-like esthetic, innovative use of materials, and unconventional details — and one of their dreamy dresses would be a great fit for Priyanka, who typically opts for embellished gowns on the red carpet.

@MICHELLEADDISONSTYLE

While it's likely Priyanka will choose white to present, I'd like to see her in red or even dusty rose. She should stay away from black and metallics. I would love her to wear American/Indian Designer Naeem Khan or even Dior.

@JILLIANVIEIRA

Priyanka has the bold-colour-plus-body-hugging look mastered, which is why I'd like to see her graduate to new textures and fits. A draped, net-like dress (in an uber-flattering metallic finish like at Valentino) would do the trick.

THE TV DINNER JESSICA ALLEN

THE OSCARS

The Oscars provide me with an excuse to make an elaborate meal out of snacks

Right after a commercial break during the Academy Awards in 1987, the camera landed on host Chevy Chase. He was picking his nose. As a 12-year-old, this was the funniest thing I'd ever seen on television. I haven't missed an Oscar ceremony since.

I love them, although not everyone does. "The next morning, we all complain about how boring it was," New York Times film critic A.O. Scott recently wrote. "The morning after that we forget it all until the next year, when the show finds new ways to disappoint us." But Mr. Scott, the disappointments are half the fun! Out of Africa outperforming both Witness and The Color Purple; Chariots of Fire upstaging On Golden Pond; Forest Gump eclipsing Pulp Fiction and The Shawshank Redemption; Crash over any other movie ever made! And what about the upsets? Crowd pleasers, like Rocky, beating All the President's Men, Network and Taxi Driver in 1976, and more recently in 2010 The King's Speech reigning over True Grit, Winter's Bone and The Social Network.

This year, however, disappointment lies more with the Academy itself. For the second year in a row they've failed to nominate a minority for best acting, which will undoubtedly provide pointed material for Chris Rock, who will have his second crack at hosting the awards on Sunday night.

The Academy's president promises to fix this by reviewing recruitment efforts.

Who knows, maybe this year, the Academy will get it right: "Every once in a while — whether out of honesty, coincidence or a bizarre outbreak of good taste — those pasty old members make a choice that reflects both the state of the art and the reality of the culture," Scott said. "Mostly, though, they manage to stage an elaborate pseudo-event and to bamboozle millions of people into paying attention. In a way, the scandal of this year's nominees confirms what too few of us in our profession are willing to admit: that the Oscars don't matter except insofar as they provide answers to future trivia questions."

Maybe — but they also provide me with an excuse to make an elaborate meal out of snacks, fancy wine and frozen food, which has been my Oscar spread for a decade now: I'm talking crostini topped with charcuterie, cheese, bruschetta-style tomatoes, guacamole, a shrimp ring, plus jalapeño poppers and mozzarella sticks, all washed down with a Nuits-Saint-Georges Burgundy.

There's not really a main course, although the calorie count easily surpasses 2,000. The point is that I can graze during the three-hour ceremony while I'm watching Twitter for fashion analysis, desperately looking for Jack Nicholson's return to the front row, tallying how many Oscars Spotlight picks up and trying to stay awake to see Leo finally get his Academy Award.

Jessica Allen is the digital correspondent on CTV's The Social.

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We know you've seen this guy before

TRIPLE 9

Anthony Mackie: The most famous actor you've never heard of

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

Anthony Mackie has played everything from a bomb-defusing soldier in The Hurt Locker to a high-flying Falcon in the Captain America movies. The 37-year-old actor's latest sees him as a crooked cop in the heist thriller Triple 9. We caught up with Mackie to investigate why he's the most famous actor you've never heard of.

Police matters

Playing a cop is familiar ground for Mackie having played 1940s gumshoes (Gangster Squad) and FBI agents (Runner, Runner). It's a role the New Orleans native clearly respects.

"Playing a police officer is really interesting to me because there's the code of the shield, it's a fraternity," said Mackie. "That was so important to me with this film — moreso than looking cool in a uniform or driving my car fast — it was showing that responsibility to that badge."

Mistaken identity

With over 40 films under his belt, Mackie is certainly recognizable — even if it's not always for his own work.

"When The Wire was on TV, the biggest joke was I was the most famous actor on The Wire who was never on The Wire," laughed Mackie about being confused with colleagues. "Now because of the whole Iron Man thing, I get Don Cheadle like once a day!"

Anthony Mackie stars in Triple 9, which opens this weekend. CONTRIBUTED

Real fiction

In May, Mackie may be replicating civil rights icon Martin Luther King, Jr. in the HBO adaptation of hit play All the Way but the actor insists he's not intimidated by real-life roles.

"It's all about what the director gives you in the script because if the director writes it from a certain perspective, that character's going to be different than he was in real life," explained Mackie.

"The reality is, I want you to come out of a movie thinking that guy was real and he lived a real life."

If it ended tomorrow

"I did this football movie which I loved, and I never thought it got the attention it deserves, (called) We Are Marshall," admitted Mackie of the role he wants to be most remembered for.

"Call it arrogant or whatever but I was good in that movie!"

Eddie (Taron Egerton), left, and his coach Bronson Peary (Hugh Jackman) rejoice in Eddie's triumph in Eddie the Eagle. CONTRIBUTED

New biopic champions last-place Olympic skier

EDDIE THE EAGLE

Tale of kitschy competitor a feel-good sports classic

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

Eddie Edwards is a textbook example of a real-life folk hero. Just don't call the infamous ski jumper an underdog.

"People say it's an underdog story," explained filmmaker Dexter Fletcher while discussing his new Olympian biopic Eddie the Eagle recently. "But it's only an underdog story if he went I'm going to go win gold and did it. Eddie just wanted to get there."

Those who remember Eddie the Eagle's rock star rise during the 1988 Olympics in Calgary may recall how the bespectacled Brit won over spectators with a spirited, albeit below-average pair of last-place jumps. But of course, it wasn't his athleticism that inspired most fans.

"I've met people who saw him jump and they said 'we'd always go and watch him because you never knew what was going to happen'," said the 50-year-old actor-turned-director. "He was about getting to be an Olympian and that reaction that you got from the crowd at Calgary was just about the natural exuberance of 'wow, I've achieved something I've always wanted to do!'"

Coincidentally, another quartet of kitschy competitors not only competed in the same Olympics, but also had a biopic produced about them. Although Fletcher hadn't planned on scouting other movies for motivation ahead of production, he does concede he caught Cool Runnings, the 1993 comedy about an unlikely bobsled team from Jamaica.

"I get why it works and I see where the similarities are and that's fine but our movie had to find our own identity, its own tone," said Fletcher. "Of course, that's what separates all these movies from the next."

After 40 years in showbiz, Fletcher should know a thing or two about making movies. A longtime London thespian that's appeared in everything from The Elephant Man to HBO's Band of Brothers, Fletcher may now enjoy extending his expertise behind the camera, but directing only came to him accidentally after shopping his first screenplay.

"I took it to some producers who just assumed that I wanted to direct it so I never told them any different," laughed Fletcher recalling his acclaimed 2011 directorial debut Wild Bill. "The film turned out well (so) I've been riding that wave ever since."

HOLLYWOOD'S TOP OLYMPIC FLICKS

Chariots of Fire (1981)
Perhaps more famous for its overbearing score by Vangelis, this Oscar-winning film tells the true story of two religiously-disparate runners competing to race at the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

Miracle (2004)
Kurt Russell sports a bad haircut and loud checkered pants to play real-life coach Herb Brooks who led a longshot American hockey team to gold at the Lake Placid Olympics in 1980.

Cool Runnings (1993)
Before finding gold with thrillers like National Treasure, filmmaker Jon Turteltaub fictionalized a family feature about the Jamaican squad that went from sitting on sunny Caribbean beaches to sliding down a snowy Olympic bobsled track in Calgary.
STEVE GOW/FOR METRO

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REASONS TO WATCH THE FILM INDEPENDENT SPIRIT AWARDS

Can't get enough of Hollywood's award season? The Film Independent Spirit Awards is just the ticket. The star-studded annual event, now in its 31st year, honours the best achievements in independent film. The ceremony is held in a tent on Santa Monica Beach, with a dollop of Oscar pageantry and a full helping of Golden Globe irreverence. It's a chance to see the industry's top talent chill out, pat each other on the back, and potentially say something they'll regret for a full year. Here are 5 other reasons to tune in:

1. The hosts. What do Kristen Bell, Steve Coogan, John Waters and Seth Rogan have in common? They've all hosted the Spirit Awards. This year, the show boasts Kate McKinnon and Kumail Nanjiani. McKinnon is a current Saturday Night Live cast member, famous for her dead-on impressions (including Justin Bieber!). Her co-host, Nanjiani, is an accomplished stand-up with a growing resume of feature films, including Sex Tape and Hot Tub Time Machine 2.

2. Behind the scenes bits. Last year, Fred Armisen's hysterical parody of Birdman saw him bob frantically through the show's backstage on a single-take adventure that led him to find actor Miles Teller pounding a live drum kit — a reference to Teller's Spirit-nominated film Whiplash.

3. Sauciness in the spotlight. Nothing says "unceremonious" like the promotional-size bottles of booze on every table at this gala dinner. This show is the setting for such moments as Michael Moore famously condemning George W. Bush. It's the setting for Jared Leto, accepting the award for Best Supporting Male for Dallas Buyers Club, who thanked everyone from Pink Floyd to the inventor of the zipper.

4. The unexpected takes centre stage. Anything can happen. Like the time director Michel Hazanavicius arrived with a full police escort from LAX just in time to receive his Best Director award for The Artist.

5. A real connection to film. Sure, it's cool to see everyone from Daniel Radcliffe and Bradley Cooper to Jane Fonda and Bruce Willis breaking bread and chugging drinks together. But it's even cooler to know why they're there. The show helps filmmakers make their movies, it builds an audience for their projects and helps diversify the film industry.

Watch the exclusive Canadian broadcast of the Film Independent Spirit Awards live on Hollywood Suite, Saturday, Feb. 27 at 5 p.m. ET.

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ACTION & ADVENTURE

Gods of Egypt

Director: Alex Proyas
Starring: Gerard Butler, Rufus Sewell

In this spectacular action-adventure inspired by the classic mythology of Egypt, the survival of mankind hangs in the balance as an unexpected mortal hero Bek (Brenton Thwaites) undertakes a thrilling journey to save the world and rescue his true love.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: NOT YET REVIEWED

Audience: + 92%

DRAMA

Race

Director: Stephen Hopkins
Starring: Stephan James, Jason Sudeikis

Race is based on the incredible true story of Jesse Owens, the legendary athletic superstar whose quest to become the greatest track and field athlete in history thrusts him onto the world stage of the 1936 Olympics, where he faces off against Adolf Hitler's vision of Aryan supremacy.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 60%

Audience: 82%

DRAMA

Triple 9

Director: John Hillcoat
Starring: Casey Affleck, Aaron Paul

In Triple 9, a crew of dirty cops is blackmailed by the Russian mob to execute a virtually impossible heist and the only way to pull it off is to manufacture a 999, police code for "officer down." Their plan is turned upside down when the unsuspecting rookie they set up to die foils the attack.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 59%

Audience: +94%

ART HOUSE

A Perfect Day

Director: Fernando León de Aranoa
Starring: Benicio Del Toro, Tim Robbins

As Sophie and her seasoned colleagues Mambru and B race against time to save the water supply for an abandoned community, they must outwit pedantic UN bureaucrats, military factions and exploitative local criminals.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 65%

Audience: 47%

DRAMA

Eddie the Eagle

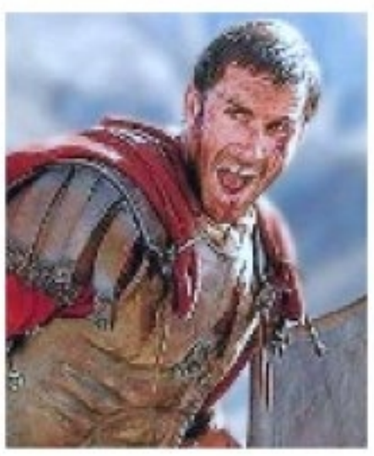
Director: Dexter Fletcher
Starring: Taron Egerton, Hugh Jackman

Inspired by true events, Eddie the Eagle is a feel-good story about Michael "Eddie" Edwards (Taron Egerton), an unlikely but courageous British ski-jumper who never stopped believing in himself — even as an entire nation was counting him out.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 77%

Audience: +91%



DRAMA

Risen

Director: Kevin Reynolds
Starring: Joseph Fiennes, Tom Felton

The first 40 days after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is told through the eyes of an agnostic Roman Centurion charged by Pontius Pilate to investigate rumours of a risen Jewish Messiah and locate the missing deceased body of Jesus of Nazareth in order to subdue an imminent uprising.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 57%

Audience: 80%

Dance scandal through the ages

Rihanna and Drake perform Wednesday at the Brit Awards. GETTY IMAGES

QUOTE

Playwright Bernard Shaw wryly described dancing as "the vertical expression of a horizontal desire legalized by music."

It says something about our resigned tolerance for sexy dance styles when Rihanna's video for Work seems to have stirred more controversy for of its use of patois than for the steamy moves. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

17TH CENTURY

Too close for prudish comfort

By today's standards the old-fashioned waltz looks pretty tame, so it's hard to imagine a time when the dance was considered a threat to public morals. The up-close embrace of the waltz traces its origins to 17th-century German peasant dances but, by the mid-18th century, was being picked up by the Viennese aristocracy as an alluring alternative to the oh-so-proper minuet. Even in Austria it raised a few eyebrows but nothing compared with the moral panic when the waltz hopped the English Channel. The Anglican clergy warned against the degenerate foreign dance, which soon became a ballroom standard.

1912

Sex in the City of Light

You'd think Paris, birthplace of the cancan and home to the Moulin Rouge, could take sexually charged dance in stride, but in May 1912 a scandal burst when Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes unveiled Vaslav Nijinsky's L'Après-midi d'un faune. Nijinsky's rendering of a mythical story about a faun ended with the beast "pleasuring himself" on a shawl dropped by a nymph.

1956

It's all about the beat

As the pulsating beat and syncopated rhythms of African-American music infiltrated white culture everything about popular dance changed. Fast forward through the bunny hug, jitterbug, Charleston and Lindy hop — all considered morally corrupting— to 1956 when a 21-year-old Elvis "The Pelvis" Presley scandalized America with his provocative Hound Dog gyrations.

PRESENT DAY

And then they twerked

South of the border, moral guardianship is always on high alert. But with stars like Miley Cyrus popularizing twerking, it won't be going away any time soon. Its name and origins are hotly debated, but twerking has clear antecedents in West African bum-jiggling dances that are not overtly sexualized and have been around for generations. Picked up across the Atlantic and absorbed into hip-hop culture, twerking has become a flashpoint for those who believe certain dance moves are too explicit to be accepted without protest.

TOMORROW

FIGHTING BACK

Discover a Toronto gym where abused women and transgender people are fighting back. Literally. It's equal parts perspiration and inspiration. Tomorrow in Toronto Star Touch – the free news app from Toronto Star.

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Jerusalem Hotel to reward couples who conceive on leap day in one of their rooms

5 BEST SPOTS FOR SCUBA DIVING IN CUBA

Over the past 25 years, 80 per cent of the Caribbean's reefs have either died or have severely degraded. However, the lack of economic development and restrictions placed on offshore activities in Cuba, along with a smattering of environmental policies, have saved the coral reefs around the island. Here's five of the best spots. **TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE**

1 Jardines de la Reina

The spectacular Jardines de la Reina is the premier dive destination for the Caribbean. It's enclosed in a marine protected area that's 170 kilometres long and 10 kms wide, and it has the healthiest coral reef ecosystem in the Caribbean. Only 500 scuba divers per year are permitted to dive in this undersea paradise. If you can only go on one dive trip in the Caribbean, this is it.

2 Cayo Largo

If you don't want to put any effort in getting to your dive vacation, Cayo Largo is a great option, as there are direct flights from Canada. You will land close to your hotel and the marina. The dive charters run efficiently, and it's a short sail to the dive sites along the nearby barrier reefs.

PHOTOS JOSPEH FREY; CORAL AND GROUPER PHOTOS ISTOCK

3 Bay of Pigs

If you're fascinated by Cold War history and wall diving that drops 450 metres into the abyss, then the Bay of Pigs is your place. The best dive sites are only a two-minute swim from shore, and they're located between the towns of Playa Larga and Playa Giron. Home to 17 varieties of flat coral, both hard and soft, the deeper you dive, the wider the coral get.

4 Isle of Youth

Punta Frances Marine National Park is tucked away on the remote southwestern tip of the Isle of Youth and formed around a peninsula with protected, white, sun-drenched sandy beaches. The reefs here are in good shape and the fish populations diverse.

5 Trinidad de Cuba

Southwest of Trinidad de Cuba, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along a starkly beautiful stretch of coastline, there is an area of wall diving with colourful coral, beautiful fish, and sharks can be seen.

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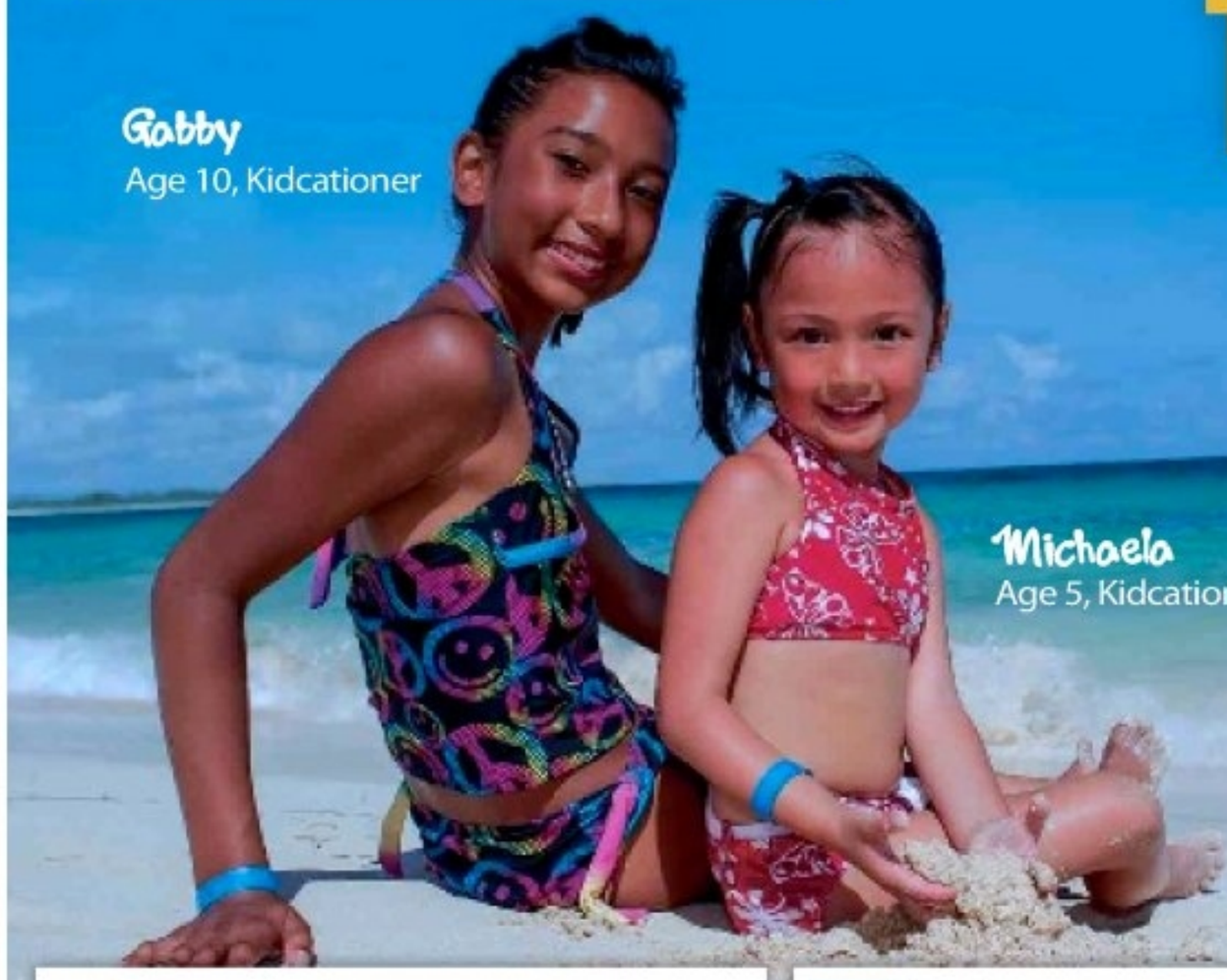

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Tourists welcome here — sort of

PROTECTION

Some popular destinations put a cap on visits

Picturesque Cinque Terre is joining places like Antarctica, the Galapagos Islands and Yosemite National Park in looking to limit the number of tourists it takes. ISTOCK

News that Italy's Cinque Terre is set to implement a ticketing system that limits the number of tourists who visit the area is the latest reminder of the privileges and pitfalls that have come with increasingly accessible airfares and mass tourism.

Cinque Terre, located in the Liguria region of Italy, is the latest tourist destination that has been forced to put a cap on tourists in a bid to preserve the integrity of its natural surroundings in the wake of explosive visitor numbers over the last few years.

In 2011, following a torrential rainfall that battered the area, Cinque Terre received 400,000 visitors. That number rebounded to 2.5 million last year, thanks in large part to docking cruise ships which drop off hundreds of thousands of day-tripping visitors in one go.

Last week, a spokesman for the national park and UNESCO World Heritage Site announced that as of this summer, visitors will have to buy an advance ticket online in order to gain access to the cliffside trails which connect the five fishing villages.

The aim is to reduce the number of tourists from 2.5 million a year, to 1.5 million.

Cinque Terre is the latest environmentally sensitive area to bear the brunt of mass tourism with the proliferation of low-budget airlines, behemoth ocean vessels and increasingly mobile tourists.

Here are a few other destinations that have either implemented tourist caps or are considering it.

Machu Picchu

In a bid to preserve and protect Peru's fabled and ancient, mountaintop ruins, the country has developed a new reconceptualization project that imposes time limits as a means to control crowd flow and requires visitors to hire an official guide for the trail. For years, experts warned that the UNESCO World Heritage Site was at risk of irreversible damage and degradation from unsustainable tourist numbers. If you want to hike to the top, the government now limits access to the classic Inca Trail to 500 permits a day. That includes support staff, such as cooks, porters and guides, further reducing the number to about 200.

Antarctica

To protect one of the few, final frontiers unspoiled by human activity and tourism, The Antarctic Treaty restricts ships with more than 500 passengers from landing sites. Vessels are also restricted to no more than one landing per site, with a maximum of 100 passengers allowed on shore at a time. A ratio of one guide to 20 passengers must also be maintained while ashore.

Barcelona

Last summer, Barcelona's newly elected mayor Ada Colau made international headlines after announcing plans to curb explosive tourism numbers by imposing a freeze on the development of new hotels and tourist apartments, and creating a preventative policy pre-empting saturation problems.

Galapagos Islands

Described as a "living museum and showcase of evolution," the collection of 19 islands which make up the Galapagos Islands groaned under the pressure of unsustainable tourism numbers over the years, putting it on the United Nations' list of endangered heritage sites. Today, a conservation program has successfully helped it make a solid recovery. To visit, tourists must now be accompanied by a licensed Galapagos National Park Guide and abide by strict rules when visiting the area. Camping is also allowed in only a handful of authorized areas, and requires a permit from park officials.

Yosemite National Park

To protect one of America's most beautiful national treasures, the US National Park Service announced measures to cap visitor numbers to 18,710 a day, and 21,000 visitors a day during peak seasons back in 2014. Yosemite was the fourth most visited national park in the US in 2015, and is best known for its waterfalls, valleys, meadows, ancient sequoias, and vast wilderness. AFP

TRAVEL NOTES NEW YORK-PARIS, B.C. AND THE GREAT NORTH

Norwegian to fly New York to Paris nonstop with fares from $175 U.S.

The Norway-based budget airline will start flying a nonstop Paris-New York route with introductory fares starting at $175 US from July 29. Norwegian is also opening Paris-U.S. routes connecting the French capital with Los Angeles and Fort Lauderdale. Although Norwegian is the first carrier to offer such attractive fares between Paris and New York, it isn't the first airline to drive down prices on the popular route. AFP

Norwegian will start flying a New York-Paris route with fares from $175 U.S. HANDOUT

International tourism to B.C. increasing, province says

The British Columbia government says the number of international visitors to the province is increasing and France is in the top spot on a list of seven countries and regions. Almost 360,000 more international visitors came to the province in 2015, with the total number approaching five million. The ministry is crediting its marketing strategy, along with the province's aboriginal tourism sector and more direct flights. THE CANADIAN PRESS

A deer spotted on Grouse mountain in Vancouver. ISTOCK

Quebec to spend $36 million on northern wilderness park

The Quebec government says it will spend $36 million to develop Parc national d'Opemican, a 252-square-kilometre tract of lakes, rivers and old pine forests in the Abitibi-Temiscamingue region along the Ontario border. The work, expected to be completed in about three years, will include the creation of a main park hub, Pointe-Opemican, on Lac Temiscamingue.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Parc national d'Opemican is getting an upgrade. ISTOCK

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metro SPORTS

Bahrain's Sheikh Salman is considered the favourite amongst five candidates on the ballot for Friday's election for the FIFA presidency

Bring on the King

NBA

Raptors trying to keep game vs. LeBron's Cavs in perspective

It's No. 1 versus 2, and a potential Eastern Conference final preview.

But the Toronto Raptors are treating Friday's battle against LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers as game No. 57 of their campaign.

Asked if it's a gauge of where their season is at, they'll tell you every game is.

"I think every game we look at as a test," said forward James Johnson. "Yesterday (Wednesday's win over Minnesota) was a test for us, those guys were young and competitive, and they're really coming into their own. And this right here is another test for us, to see if we can play with the best."

9/10

Friday's game is part of a stretch that sees the Raptors play nine of 10 at home.

The Raptors (38-18) trail the Eastern Conference-leading Cavs by just three games, and are 17-3 in their last 20 games — the best 20-game stretch in franchise history. It's also the best record in the conference over that stretch.

The Raptors beat the Cavs 103-99 on Nov. 25 in Toronto, but then were blown out 122-100 on Jan. 4 in Cleveland.

Coach Dwane Casey said Friday's game will just be a small part of the Raptors' season story.

"I'm just as concerned with the next game in Detroit (Sunday) as I am (Friday) night," Casey said after practice at the team's new BioSteel Centre. "Either way, it's not going to determine how much we need to continue to improve, continue to be hungry, continue to fight and stay focused.

"It should be fun, it's a challenge, but it's not going to be something that defines your season or who we are."

A victory Friday would be 10 in a row for the Raptors at Air Canada Centre, which would break a franchise record that goes back to 1999.

A big focus will be perimeter defence. The Cavs Made 17 of 33 attempts from distance in their rout of Toronto.

"That's huge," Casey said. "We've got to get to our positions early. Where we got caught is we're out there with three-point shooters, now we get in to help on penetration, now you've got to get back out, that's called the accordion effect. You can't do that against a good team like they are." THE CANADIAN PRESS

LeBron James posted 24 points, eight assists and six rebounds but Bismack Biyombo and the Raptors still won 103-99 on Nov. 25 at Air Canada Centre. RICK MADONIK/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

SPRING TRAINING

MVP rejoins Blue Jays

Josh Donaldson isn't worried about the Toronto Blue Jays' offensive potential this upcoming season.

He just feels sorry for opposing pitchers.

"The fact of the matter is, you have me, then you have Jose Bautista, who hit 40 homers last year ... then Edwin Encarnacion, who's hit over 40, then Russell Martin ... (Chris) Colabello, (Justin) Smoak ... Tulo (Troy Tulowitzki) — I mean, Jesus, it just keeps going," Donaldson said.

"I wouldn't want to pitch against us. There were a lot of guys last year that we faced who were defeated before they even threw the first pitch. And those guys made their exit pretty quick."

Donaldson, the reigning AL MVP, reported to Blue Jays camp Thursday in Dunedin, Fla., after a jam-packed off-season.

He played with PGA Tour star Jason Dufner in the Pebble Beach Pro Am — where he rubbed elbows with Justin Timberlake — took a photo of himself with Carolina Panthers QB Cam Newton at an Auburn football game (both are Tigers alumni), and even landed a speaking role in the History Channel's Canadian-Irish drama series Vikings.

"I had a great time," Donaldson said about his acting gig. "Went to Ireland (to film the episode), got to meet a lot of the cast members there, got to dress up and become a Viking. It's something that is kind of still a little bit surreal to me.

"I've never been on a TV show. I never claimed to be an actor. But now I am an actor."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

NHL LEAFS WEATHER HURRICANES Leafs forward Brad Boyes chips in Toronto's first goal against the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday at Air Canada Centre. Josh Leivo and P.A. Parenteau also scored in the Leafs' 3-1 win. TODD KOROL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Pair of scorers shut down for season

Toronto Maple Leafs forwards James van Riemsdyk and Joffrey Lupul will miss the rest of the season due to injuries.

Van Riemsdyk's recovery from a non-displaced fracture in his left foot has taken longer than expected, a team spokesman confirmed Thursday evening. The left-winger will likely resume skating in 2-3 weeks but will not return this season.

Lupul, meanwhile, had season-ending surgery on Monday to repair a sports hernia.

Joffrey Lupul, left, and James van Riemsdyk GETTY IMAGES

Van Riemsdyk had 29 points (14 goals, 15 assists) in 40 games before suffering the fracture in early January. Lupul had 14 points (11-3) in 46 games.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TRADE IN BRIEF

Jets lose captain as Ladd sent back to Chicago

Winnipeg Jets captain Andrew Ladd was traded to Chicago on Thursday in a multi-player deal.

Forward Matt Fraser and defenceman Jay Harrison are also being sent to Chicago. Both will report to the American Hockey League's Rockford IceHogs.

Winnipeg gets forward Marko Dano, the Blackhawks' first-round pick in the 2016 NHL Draft and a conditional pick in 2018.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

AL MVP Josh Donaldson
RICK MADONIK/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Toronto FC closer to finalizing roster

MLS

Pair of Canadians likely to move up to big club

With a little more than a week before the MLS season kicks off, Toronto FC's squad is taking shape.

With a strong base already in place, general manager Tim Bezbatchenko was selective in his off-season additions. Goalkeeper Clint Irwin, fullback Steven Beitashour, centre back Drew Moor and Canadian midfielder Will Johnson fill needs and will slide into the starting 11.

Some questions about the full squad were answered Thursday with the news that goalkeeper Alex Bono, defender Wesley Charpie, midfielders Chris Mannella and Brian James and forward Darius Madison were returned home to join Toronto FC II ahead of the senior team's pre-season finale Saturday against Philadelphia.

Quillan Roberts has likely won the backup goalkeeper job behind Clint Irwin. GETTY IMAGES FILE

"I like all of them. The harsh reality is we don't have any roster spots," said Toronto head coach Greg Vanney.

The moves mean Quillan Roberts has won the backup goalie battle and that first-round draft choice Tsubasa Endoh and academy product Mo Babouli, like Roberts a Canadian, have likely also made the first team.

Toronto currently has 27 players on its roster including injured defender Clement Simonon and absent striker Luke Moore. Endoh and Babouli have to sign MLS contracts to join the roster.

With rosters having to comply with the league's salary budget March 1, Bezbatchenko has some housekeeping ahead of him but no heavy lifting. A door will be found for Moore. And the GM will ponder whether to stretch his $3.49-million US salary budget across 18 or 20 players, as allowed under MLS rules.

Teams can carry 28 players with the last eight — the so-called supplemental roster — not counting against the salary budget. THE CANADIAN PRESS

INJURY REPORT

Sebastian Giovinco was back in training Thursday after sitting out a few days with a leg knock. Fellow striker Jozy Altidore remains out with a mild hamstring pull and his availability for the March 6 season opener at the New York Red Bulls is a question mark.

EUROPA LEAGUE RASHFORD RESCUES UNITED Manchester United striker Marcus Rashford makes a play on the ball against FC Midtjylland defender Kian Hansen on Thursday in Manchester. Rashford, 18, scored twice in his professional debut in a 5-1 win. United won 6-3 on aggregate to reach the last 16. OLI SCARFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

IN BRIEF

Afghan boy receives signed shirts from Messi

UNICEF says Lionel Messi has sent signed shirts to the Afghan boy who was pictured wearing a homemade Argentina shirt with the No. 10 on the back.

A picture of five-year-old Murtaza Ahmadi wearing an Argentina shirt made from a plastic bag went viral in January.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Alberta clinches top-2 seed

Alberta's Chelsea Carey not only clinched a playoff berth at the Canadian women's curling championship Thursday, she also earned a spot in the playoff game between the top two seeds.

The host province downed Nova Scotia's Jill Brothers 8-2 to get to a record of 8-2. It had one game remaining in the preliminary round.

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GOLF

Garcia tied for lead in Florida

Sergio Garcia made an eagle, avoided an alligator and wound up in a share of the lead Thursday at the Honda Classic in Florida.

Garcia holed out with an 8-iron from 142 yards into the wind on the second hole for an eagle, and he narrowly missed an eagle putt on the 18th hole at PGA National. The Spaniard shot 5-under 65 and shared the lead with Michael Thompson, the 2013 Honda Classic winner, who also birdied the last hole.

They were one shot ahead of Rickie Fowler and William McGirt. The biggest excitement for Garcia was on the par-4 sixth hole, where he made his lone bogey.

His tee shot found the water left of the fairway, shallow enough for him to roll up his pants and try to play it out to the fairway. That part was easy. He looked over his shoulder because of an alligator on the island, making sure it wasn't going anywhere soon. "I was more worried about the alligator that was on the other side of the island than getting out of the water," Garcia said. "The ball, I could see probably half of it, so I knew that I could get it out."

Sergio Garcia
GETTY IMAGES

And he was happy with other 60 strokes he took on a typical windy day at PGA National. Fowler had the only bogey-free round, which included a chip-in for par on the 10th hole. McGirt was more on the wild side by making seven birdies.

"Anything in the red is good around this place," McGirt said. "At 4 under, I would say it was bordering on great. This place is never easy, even when it's calm. You can't fall asleep on any shot out here."

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RECIPE Eggs, Asparagus & Couscous

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

This is almost not a recipe at all, which come Friday night is what we all need, right? Tell yourself you're experimenting with one of those trendy grain bowls. Or just sit down and enjoy a speedy dinner.

Ready in
Prep time: 5 minutes
Total time: 20 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 cup couscous
- 16 asparagus spears
- 4 eggs (very fresh poach best)
- 2 tsp vinegar
- Parsley or chives, chopped

Directions
1. Get three pots of water boiling. One with just a bit of water for the asparagus, a very shallow pan for the eggs and 2 cups of salted water in a pot for the couscous.
2. Add couscous to boiling water and stir. It will take up a lot of water right away. After a couple minutes, turn off heat and put the lid on the pot. Leave couscous aside to absorb remaining water.
3. Now, poach your eggs. Add vinegar to boiling water. Crack eggs into ramekins. Tip the eggs into the simmering water. Turn off heat, cover the pan and leave alone for 5 minutes.
4. In your third pot, put trimmed asparagus in boiling water until they're tender — about 3 to 5 minutes. Drain and rinse in cool water to stop them from cooking.
5. Spoon couscous onto your plate, lay down four spears of asparagus then scoop eggs out of the water with a slotted spoon and lay on top. Garnish with chives and salt and pepper.

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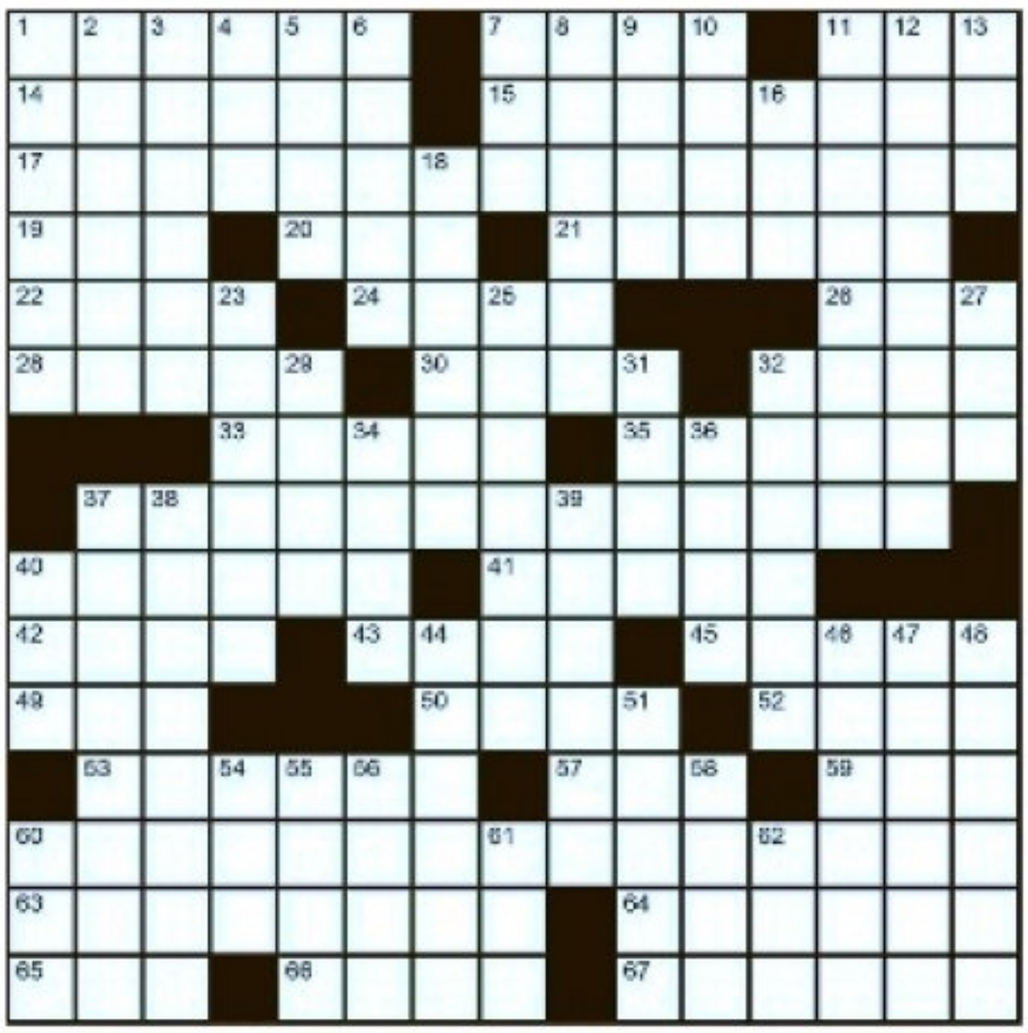
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. "Mutual of _ Wild Kingdom"
7. Money __ object
11. EMT's skill
14. Backstreet Boys: "All I __ Give"
15. Tofu: 2 wds.
17. Rapunzel and Rumpelstiltskin: 2 wds.
19. Profession, puny-ly
20. Down
21. Magistrates' mallets
22. Mr. LaBeouf
24. Sprint
26. Mag. edition
28. Actress Katherine
30. Volkswagen Karmann _
32. Person of the Arctic
33. "_ Was a Lady" (1945)
35. As per #37-Down, Canadian diamond producer which found the world's second-largest gem quality diamond in November of 2015
37. Extra extras are needed on a movie set for one: 3 wds.
40. Piano piece
41. English slammers
42. Web address starter
43. "House" role, Dr. Chris _
45. French operas composer, Daniel _ (b.1782 - d.1871)
49. "The 18th letter is known _ '_'."
50. Frankenfoods ingredients, commonly
52. Cornmeal bread
53. Outfitted one
57. Craze
59. Post-op locale
60. Though David Weiser designed it in 1964, it only became one of Canada's official symbols in 2011: 3 wds.
63. Cold sufferer
64. 'B.' of Samuel F.B. Morse
65. Meander
66. Pericles, Prince of _
67. Replied positively

DOWN
1. "Goodness me.": 2 wds.
2. Montreal 'market'
3. Swedish DJ/producer
4. Tailor's trimmee
5. 24-hr. bankers
6. To date: 2 wds.
7. There: Latin
8. Composer Mr. Rachmaninoff
9. Quebec water brand
10. A-ha's "The Sun Always Shines __ _-_"
11. The world's largest gem quality diamond, found in South Africa in 1905
12. Stress causer
13. Shortened streets
16. Flight simulators co.
18. Leisurely music tempo
23. Multi-married-man/Newest-wife separator: 2 wds.
25. Enjoy a stick of Juicy Fruit: 2 wds.
27. Music style
29. Milky tip to 'ose'
31. Plus
32. Becomes frozen: 2 wds.
34. "Darn it!"
36. Calif. campus
37. Country in Africa where #35-Across' Karowe Mine is located
38. Fearless
39. Lightly remove a stain: 2 wds.
40. _ Na Na
44. Concurring person
46. Boxes: French
47. Box in
48. Met with former classmates
51. Didn't help: 2 wds.
54. Planet Melmac alien
55. Looted, archaically
56. For Better or For Worse mom
58. Challenge
60. Lettered food additive
61. 'Is', plurally
62. CV

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
You want to feel that you're doing something useful with your life and with Uranus strong in your sign it's up to you to make that happen. Don't do it alone though, there are others who share your ideals.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Do something that gets you noticed and marks you both as a free thinker and person of action. Don't wait for opportunities to come to you, get out there and grab them yourself.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
If you get the chance to travel today you must take it, even if it means breaking other plans. People you meet while on the move will bring you luck — and maybe love too!

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You will have to make a number of quick decisions today. Trust your instincts and they are more likely to be smart decisions. Don't worry if some people make fun of your ideas.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
It may be frustrating that others are putting obstacles in your path but there is no point making a fuss. Just carry on as you are and believe that you will reach your goal when the time is right — and you will.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
You could push yourself too hard today and over the weekend and put your wellbeing at risk. A simple rule of thumb: make sure you stay fit and healthy — don't go to extremes.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
There is virtually nothing you cannot do but that does not mean you are obliged to do everything. Identify the two or three aims, then focus on them to the exclusion of everything else. Success will surely follow.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
If you rise to the challenges that face you today you'll find ways to overcome. Family ties will work in your favour, so let loved ones know what you need.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Come and go as you please today and over the weekend. Once you get over the fear that others might disapprove of your actions there is nothing that can hold you back.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
It feels as if something important is leaving your life but don't worry because something better will replace it. Remember that you deserve the best — because then you will get it.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
The Sun left your birth sign a week ago but that does not mean your luck has changed. On the contrary, where money matters are concerned everything seems in order. Put some cash aside for a rainy day.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
Your mind is being overwhelmed by so senseless chatter. Find a quiet place where you can be on your own, a sacred spot where you can get your thoughts together.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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		1					5	
		3	1					
	6	9				3	8	
					7	2		
	5					4		
							2	
	2	6		3	9			5

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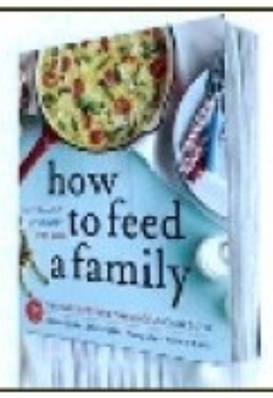

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

Your daily crossword and Sudoku answers from the play page.

for more fun and games go to metronews.ca/games

4	8	7	1	6	2	5	3	9
3	9	1	4	7	5	8	6	2
5	2	6	9	3	8	4	1	7
7	5	3	6	8	9	1	2	4
9	6	2	7	4	1	3	5	8
1	4	8	5	2	3	7	9	6
8	1	4	3	9	6	2	7	5
2	3	9	8	5	7	6	4	1
6	7	5	2	1	4	9	8	3

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